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Lodgkin - Three Phases of Quakerism

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Henry T. Menzell

THREE
PHASES OF QUAKERISM.

AN ADDRESS

BY

J. B. HODGKIN.

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THREE PHASES OF QUAKERISM:

A.—MONASTIC.

B.—PHILANTHROPIC.

C.—EVANGELISTIC.

IT would be difficult to insist too strongly on the fact that the main reason for the existence of the Society of Friends as a separate religious community is its practical testimony to the reality of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Individual members of other churches show by their lives that they accept this truth as unreservedly as ourselves ; but their corporate action is such as necessarily tends, in greater or less degree, to substitute reliance upon human arrangements for obedience to the voice of God.

As a proof of this tendency, I may refer to Dr. Jacob's "Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament," where the author, himself a learned clergyman, draws a picture of Apostolic worship closely resembling that now practised by Friends. The departure of his own church from primitive usage he defends upon the ground that the "Ministry of Gifts," bestowed in the earliest days of Christianity, has since been withdrawn, and that it has therefore been needful to establish a "Ministry of Orders" in its place. Here we are able to join issue with him on a simple question of fact, and to assert, with all reverence and yet with boldness, that the "Ministry of Gifts" is continued to the present day.

The result of erroneous teaching as to the withdrawal of Spiritual Gifts is only too obvious.

If I go into any church or chapel I *may* hear that which is really helpful to me, and may be able to unite in the worship.

If so, well and good. But if not? If I go hungry and find only chaff placed before me instead of wheat; if I realise that there are other hungry souls round me, who, like myself, are unfed? If it were a Friends' Meeting, there would be opportunity for prayer on behalf of these fellow-worshippers, liberty to speak to them a few simple words concerning their Saviour's love and His readiness to supply all their need. But in a church or chapel no such liberty is possible. All must be conducted according to a pre-arranged order; and the man or woman who has a true sense of the needs of the congregation, and a true call to address those present, must either disobey the call or run the risk of being punished as a "brawler"!

Other illustrations might readily be given, but enough has been said to indicate the importance of keeping the reason for our existence steadily in view, and continuing to uphold, practically as well as theoretically, our testimony to the reality of Divine guidance.

It is, however, important to remember that whenever a principle is pushed into undue prominence, to the exclusion of others equally true, not only does our view of truth as a whole become distorted, but the principle itself loses some of its hold upon the minds of men by reason of an inevitable reaction against the unwise assertion of it. Let us therefore glance at some of the dangers which beset us in this direction.

1.—The danger of representing the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as at all antagonistic the one to the other. To dwell on the evil consequences of these errors would necessitate a lengthy review of the history of Christendom. For our present purpose it is sufficient to point out that, just as some have erred by an unscriptural attempt to exalt (as they supposed) the work of the Son by partially or wholly ignoring the love of the Father, so others have put needless difficulties in the way of seeking souls by attributing

the salvation of man to the work of the Holy Spirit without reference to the death upon the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead.

2.—The danger of forgetting that “whatsoever any man says or does which is contrary to the Scriptures, though under profession of the immediate guidance of the Spirit, must be reckoned and accounted a mere delusion.” *

3.—The danger of forgetting that the treasure, unspeakably precious though it be, is contained in *earthen* vessels (2 Cor. iv. 7), and that we need to watch and pray lest we fall into the temptation of mistaking our own fancies or prejudices for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

4.—The danger of forgetting that one evidence of being “filled with the Spirit” is a readiness to subject ourselves “one to another in the fear of Christ.” (Eph. v. 18, 21).

Bearing in mind such cautions as these, we may safely accept what would otherwise be the too wide definition given by a minister of our Society, who stated that Quakerism was “Liberty, under the guidance of the Spirit.” The cordial recognition of this liberty should lead us, not merely to tolerate, but to welcome wide divergences of method, both in the statement of truths held dear by all, and in the expression of feelings common to all. If only there be sufficient unity of faith and of practice to ensure harmonious co-operation in the varied work of the church, these differences of method will tend to make that work more effective than would be possible under any system which aimed at outward uniformity. It is, therefore, in no narrow or jealous spirit that I propose to examine some of the phases of thought and action which Quakerism has developed, but rather in the hope of obtaining practical help for the work with which God has entrusted us.

* Book of Discipline, 1883, page 14.

A.—THE MONASTIC PHASE.

It may not unfairly be claimed for the Society of Friends that it has, during at any rate a part of its existence, given to its members many of the advantages of a monastic life, whilst preserving them from some of its disadvantages. The maintenance of a costume and a phraseology which had become obsolete, and therefore remarkable, were only the outward signs of a system which placed "separation from the world" in the very front rank of Christian virtues, and emphasized the duty of meditation as essential for all who desired a growth in grace.

Many of us know, by the bitter experience of ourselves or of those dear to us, that these outward signs came to be mischievous, not only by their failure to exclude worldliness from the hearts of those who adopted them; not only by the time and thought which were diverted from more important matters; not only by the hardness of the yoke which external authority imposed upon those to whom these peculiarities were not a matter of conscience; but, worst of all, by the incentive to deception which they afforded to those who resented this yoke and yet felt unable openly to reject it. It is, therefore, a cause for thankfulness that the maintenance of these peculiarities, though still a matter of individual duty to some and of personal preference to others, is no longer a testimony of the Society of Friends.

But should the abandonment of the outward sign involve the surrender of the principle behind it? We, of all others, should hasten to answer "No." We profess that a real experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and of Communion with our risen Lord, so far from being dependent upon the outward rites with which they are often associated, is sometimes hindered by their observance. Similarly, it should be our aim to be not the less, but the more unworldly, now that these

outward barriers are broken down ; to submit ourselves without reserve to that "expulsive power of a new affection " which is a far more effectual safeguard to the tempted soul than any "hedge" with which human prudence can surround us.

And surely the need of a safeguard is as great as ever. The ball-room and the theatre are frequented by some who would indignantly repudiate the suggestion that they were not "good Friends ;" and other pursuits, less harmful in themselves, are indulged in to an extent which the widest charity can hardly believe helpful to the spiritual life. Which of us is not conscious that the pace at which we live, the pressure of public and private duties, nay, even our laudable desire to use our leisure for the good of others, tend to limit the time which we devote to waiting upon the Lord, and that thus we fail to obtain from Him that renewal of our strength which we need ?

For these and other reasons, which cannot now be considered, it seems clear that the present generation has much to learn from those whose mode of life and habit of mind have been contemplative rather than active, and who have exhibited, often in a highly instructive manner, the *monastic* phase of Quakerism.

Yet, before passing to other topics, it may be well to refer to one evil which this habit of mind tends to develop, namely, the absence of simplicity. Self-examination is good ; the prayer, "Search me, O God " is one which we cannot safely neglect ; and yet there is a danger in that continual introspection which tends to become morbid, and which can only be cured by "looking [away] unto Jesus." (Heb. xii. 2.) For want of *simplicity* many who might have been faithful and honoured workers in the Lord's harvest field have resisted His call, seeking to "prove the fleece wet and dry," until the opportunity for service has passed, it may be never to return. It is easy to take credit for humility, when we ought rather to

acknowledge that we are self-conscious ; to boast that we have successfully avoided " creaturely activity," when we should be repenting of our unbelief and disobedience ; to dwell so exclusively on those precious visitations of the Holy Spirit which are given to restrain us from sin, as to forget the no less blessed manifestations whereby He constrains us to enter into the vineyard and work. How many have thus missed the joy of serving the best of Masters, and have drifted into lukewarmness, or even unbelief ! Is there any virtue which, at the present time, needs more earnestly praying for than that of child-like, self-forgetful simplicity ?

B.—THE PHILANTHROPIC PHASE.

Here, again, we " have a goodly heritage " (Ps. xvi. 5). The very fact that, rightly or wrongly, Friends have at times felt themselves restrained from some forms of Christian activity adopted by other churches, has turned much of their energy into the philanthropic channel. Honest examination of some of the causes of human misery, and patient, business-like endeavours to remove them, have been more fruitful of good than visionary schemes, or wild, random speeches. Brotherly co-operation with men and women differing widely in religious belief, but alike influenced by the " enthusiasm of humanity," has broadened the sympathies and expanded the minds of some who might otherwise have suffered from the narrowing effects of associating almost exclusively with members of their own Society.

Great as have been the triumphs of the past, more remains to be accomplished. Slavery and the Slave-trade still need to be abolished ; War, and the innumerable crimes which it induces still mar our civilisation and reproach our Christianity ;

the very Government for which we Englishmen are responsible does its best to counteract the efforts of our missionaries by promoting the manufacture and habitual use of poisonous drugs at home and abroad ; whilst the "problem of poverty" is forcing itself upon us with an urgency which cannot be denied.

There is a call for men and women who will honour their forefathers, not so much by words of superfluous praise, as by a similar devotion to the cause of humanity. Earthly pleasure, often bountifully given by our loving Father in Heaven, becomes a curse when pursued as the end and aim of life. The labour which God has appointed as the means whereby men are to provide for their own (1 Tim. v. 8), and to "walk honestly toward them that are without" (1 Thes. iv. 11, 12), becomes degrading when it is pursued for merely selfish ends, whatever those ends may be. Everywhere the workers are toiling on, asking in vain for the active co-operation and prayerful sympathy which they have a right to expect, and only able to persevere because their faith is not in man but in God. Haste to the rescue, ye "that are at ease in Zion" (Amos vi. 1) ; keeping your motives pure and your hearts warm by taking for your motto the words of the beloved disciple:—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John iv. 10, 11).

C.—THE EVANGELISTIC PHASE.

The true philanthropist will not content himself with ministering to the bodily and the intellectual needs of others ; he will long to share with them the spiritual blessings which are

his own greatest treasure. If he is a practical worker, and not a mere theorist, he will find that the outward reformation of those whom he seeks to help is comparatively valueless without that real change of heart, the necessity of which is borne witness to both by Holy Scripture and by human experience. We may draw the most vivid pictures of the evils wrought by strong drink and of the comforts obtainable by sobriety ; but the poor drunkard knows all this far better than we do, and unless we can tell him of One who is able both to save and to keep him, our efforts to reclaim him will probably fail. We may convince hundreds of the wickedness and the folly of war ; but unless their loyalty to Christ is sufficient to make them willing to risk all things rather than disobey His law of full and loving forgiveness, the first time the heart of the nation is stirred they will join in the outcry for revenge.

If we are not full of longing for the salvation of souls there is need for that close self-examination spoken of in the earlier part of this paper ; for "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9), and Christ came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10). We dwell with thankful joy on the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world ;" but too often forget that it belongs to those who obey the command to "go . . . and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20), and that those who are not in sympathy with evangelistic work must therefore expect to lose much of the blessing of the Lord's presence.

"Sympathy with evangelistic work" does not necessarily imply full unity with every worker, or full approval of every method employed ; but it does involve that clear recognition of the universal obligation resting upon all Christians, which will make us more ready to pray for and encourage those who are working under the constraining love of Christ than to find fault with them when their methods are different from our own.

Let us come back to our definition of Quakerism, "Liberty, under the guidance of the Spirit," and rejoice that "there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all" (1 Cor. xii. 6). Copying other men must be bad, whether our model be George Fox or Commissioner Tucker, Francis Xavier or Elizabeth Fry; but obeying God's Holy Spirit must be right, whether men think we are copyists on the one hand or innovators on the other. Those who love novelty need not dread the old paths; those who hate change need not fear the new. The one question for us all to ask is, "What is God's will?" and, when this is answered, our *first* business is to do it.

That there is danger in zeal without discretion may most fully be admitted; but will it for a moment bear comparison with the danger of discretion without zeal? For want of discretion, mistakes are at times made which all of us sincerely regret; but, for want of zeal, meeting houses are closed, congregations are unfed, and multitudes who are ready to receive the bread of life from our hands turn sadly and longingly away.

Let us remember what we heard at Bunhill Fields, a year ago,* and recognise that the evangelization of the world is the *primary* work of the church, and that therefore all other church work will be better done by being placed in its proper subordinate position. The primary work of the locomotive is to pull the train; and though we recognise as essential the skill and labour whereby the machinery is perfected and kept in repair, there would be short shrift for the driver who should refuse to leave the shed on a dusty or stormy day through fear of his pet

* "Are the Principles of the Society of Friends adapted for the Evangelization of the People?" by Henry Stanley Newman. Orphans' Printing Press, Leominster. 1888.

engine becoming soiled or strained in the performance of her duty.

We take credit to ourselves, and often with reason, for being a practical, common-sense people. We like to be practical in our business, and practical in our philanthropy. Let us be practical also in the work of winning souls, devoting to it the best of our time, the best of our energy, the best of our intellect, and the best of our love. Yes, and the best of our children also. We delight to train these dear ones to become successful in worldly pursuits ; why do we neglect to give them definite training to fit them for the service of their Heavenly Master? We rejoice when they receive honour from their fellow-men ; why is it often considered a matter for condolence when a parent has the far higher honour of seeing his child surrender the prospect of earthly reward to enlist in the service of the King of Kings, whether the field of battle be at home or abroad? For them, and for ourselves, there is one kind of prosperity to be supremely sought, that " blessing of the Lord " which does indeed make rich, and to which no sorrow is added. (Prov. x. 22).

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